



# DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

## INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release MONDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1940.

### ALASKA STILL IMPORTANT PRODUCER OF WILDLIFE, ANNUAL REPORT SHOWS

Exactly 554,725 fur pelts valued at more than \$1,900,000 were shipped from Alaska last year, the Alaska Game Commissioners declared today in their annual report to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes. With the exception of 1932, when some 613,000 pelts left the Territory, this is the highest number of fur pelts shipped to the States during the past 15 years.

The total value of the 1939-40 pelts, however, was not as high as in some previous years when the average value of pelts exceeded the \$3.44 received last year.

The Alaska Game Commission, which is the operating agency of the Fish and Wildlife Service, administers all the fur and game laws in the Territory.

### More Than 1,000,000 Big-Game Animals

Alaska still abounds in wildlife, the report reveals.

For the fourth consecutive year it appears that most varieties of wild ducks, geese, and shorebirds increased on their nesting grounds in Alaska, although the available areas are still far from being completely utilized.

It is estimated that more than 1,000,000 big-game animals range over the Territory's wilderness areas. Among the big-game animals is the Sitka black-tailed deer, 42,000 of which were estimated to be in the humid southeastern portion of Alaska. Moose are particularly abundant on the Kenai Peninsula and in Rainy Pass.

Caribou are still abundant, the report points out, even though their number has been reduced. Once this animal moved across the tundras of Alaska in spectacular massed migrations that included herds of thousands of animals.

"The caribou with its subspecies is still the most abundant big-game animal in Alaska," the report declares, "but now there are only hundreds where there were thousands a few years ago." In an effort to halt further decline "stricter regulations have been adopted and closed areas have been established along the highways where these animals may be free to cross without being subjected to hailstorms of lead from passing motorists."

Mountain sheep and mountain goats are maintaining their numbers and doing well.

The numerous varieties of bears in Alaska are more than holding their own. The large brown bears show definite signs of increasing. The grizzlies show little if any fluctuation. In the far north, the great white polar bears now are more numerous than for a decade. Black bears are plentiful.

Transplanted big-game animals have taken root and are increasing year by year. The 23 buffaloes released at Big Delta in 1928 have developed into a herd of 225 animals, including a male albino born in the spring of 1939. This is one of the three known albino buffaloes in North America. A small seeding of 8 Olympic elk on Afognak Island in 1927 has grown to numbers exceeding 200. In 1930, 34 muskoxen were shipped to the Territory from Greenland, and now the herd is believed to have more than doubled itself.

Big-game hunters shipped 217 animals from Alaska during the year. Nonresident and alien hunters accounted for 134 animals and resident exporters for 83. Included were 39 moose, 35 mountain sheep, 8 mountain goats, 20 caribous, 11 deer, 73 large brown and grizzly bears, and 31 black bears.

### Wildlife Agents Patrol Vast Areas

Only 10 wildlife agents and 2 deputies patrol the vast areas of the Territory to enforce the fur and game laws. Last year the agents traveled a total of 155,192 miles by commercial steamer, patrol vessel, outboard motor, automobile, railroad, airplane, dogteam, and on foot. The agents walked almost 5,300 miles and mushed their dogteams for some 1,900 miles.

In all, 234 violators were apprehended, with 79 cases settled by release of seized articles and 155 cases going to court. Of the **latter**, convictions were obtained in all but three cases. Fines totaled almost \$7,000, and jail sentences aggregated 3,145 days.

One agent flew his personally owned plane 4,000 miles along the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean to the International Boundary and return, landing at numerous Eskimo villages where no representative of the Commission had even been before and where an airplane had never been seen. This same agent flew 17,000 miles last year at an average cost of 2 cents a mile.

### Annual Fur Values Average \$2,500,000

The gathering of fur peltries still constitutes the main occupation of several thousands of Eskimos, Indians, and white settlers. It is exceeded in value only by fishery products and by minerals. Among the fur animals sought by the trappers are the red, cross, silver, blue, and white foxes; and minks, beavers, martens, muskrats, lynxes, land otters, ermines, wolverines, polar bears, and black bears.

Last year 405 wolf pelts were exported from Alaska. The Territorial Legislature pays a \$20 bounty for each wolf taken. The timber wolf is Alaska's native predator and ranges widely and nearly throughout the Territory. It is apparently

highly destructive to caribous, moose, mountain sheep, mountain goats, deer, and other game animals.

During the past 15 years, the land fur animals have produced a total income of almost \$38,700,000 or some \$2,580,000 a year. The average price of pelts has varied from a low of \$1.88 in 1932 to a high of \$15.18 in 1929. This year the average pelt brought \$3.44, while the 15-year average is \$5.94 a pelt.

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